

Starting a Guild or Regional Network



A manual and workbook for leaders of local groups associated with the Network of Biblical Storytellers International



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Definitions

Let's start out with some definitions. What do we mean when we talk about a biblical storytelling guild? How is that different from the many secular storytelling organizations and events that are popping up?

A story is an *oral event* that is created or **recreated** through the **voice, face and body** of the teller in such a way that the audience *experiences* the event.

Biblical storytelling is a *spiritual discipline* that entails first committing to the deep memory* a narrative text of the Old or New Testament and then engaging with it in a lively telling as a *sacred event* that *binds teller and listeners in community*.

Deep memory: Committing to the deep memory is “internalizing the story” as a complex of *structures, images, and feelings learned in the heart*, not merely words recited by rote.

Why bother?

- 1) Learning the stories by heart is a powerful spiritual discipline for an individual.
- 2) Hearing the stories told by heart is a powerful, life-giving spiritual influence in a congregation.



Scripture by Heart Team: A group of folks within a single congregation whose vision is to enable one another to take turns telling at least one of the Scripture texts in worship every week.

Guild or Regional Network: A group of folks who are able to connect with one another either geographically or technologically to encourage one another in the Network of Biblical Storytellers International mission to *encourage everyone to learn and tell biblical stories*. A guild/regional network is usually ecumenical, made up of folks from many congregations and traditions. And they can have different visions. This manual will offer you various ideas for that.



Genres of biblical storytelling: These days there are many different arts being called “biblical storytelling,” and that contributes to misunderstandings.

- **Text-telling:** the basic art of telling the actual canonical text of Scripture (based on your chosen base translation) with a goal of at least 75% word accuracy and 95% meaning accuracy. This is NBSI's passion: to bring the text, as it has been transmitted to us in the tradition, alive for folks in today's world. As Tom Boomershine says, no faith can continue in strength if its foundation stories are ignored, lost, or skewed.
- **Midrash:** Non-canonical stories, often using biblical characters as “types” or expanding on the text. “Midrash” means “interpretation,” and usually refers to traditional Jewish rabbinic stories. But, for example, “George Washington and the cherry tree” is an American midrash.
- **First-person or third-person:** Stories composed by the teller expanding on the textual story as a base, either in first or third person. These are marvelous “story sermons” but don't replace the art of telling the text. Details in the composed story may come from the teller's imagination and research, expanding understanding of the story, and different tellers can certainly have different takes on a story. But the composed story does not *contradict* the text; details and directions must be justifiable.

- **Storying:** In cultures which have few or no Scriptures translated into the people’s heart language, or where available texts are old and no longer reflect the people’s speech, stories must be crafted carefully in new words while ensuring 95% meaning accuracy.

NBSI folks appreciate and participate in all these genres, but the basic one on which the others are built is text-telling.

Network of Biblical Storytellers International: A loose network of people and organizations whose mission is to *encourage everyone to learn and tell biblical stories by heart*. NBSI asks that national organizations and guilds/regional networks uphold these six core values within their own contexts:

- Love for the **text** as it has come to us in the church’s tradition, and for telling the text from an accurate scholarly translation, such as the New Revised Standard Version (NBSI's recommended English translation), with at least 75% word accuracy and 95% meaning accuracy (except in work with children).
- **Ecumenicity:** Understanding that Christ’s universal Church includes all who follow Jesus, of every tradition, denomination or independent congregation. We focus on the *stories*, which are the common language of all followers of Jesus, and avoid getting involved in theological differences.
- **Inclusive welcome for all** people. We focus on the *stories*, which are the Church’s common language.
- Equal leadership of **men and women**. We strongly urge guilds to model equal leadership as closely as possible.
- Love for **good scholarship** as we dig into the texts so that we can understand their meaning in their original context, to tell the stories with integrity for our own context.
- Understanding that the overall arc of the Bible’s story is one of **peace**; God’s mission to reconcile all people to each other and to God. The story is “God’s Story of justice, peace and love” (Dennis Dewey, *I Love to Tell the Story*) and that’s how we strive to tell it. We believe that sharing sacred stories with folks of other religious traditions is one avenue toward peace.

Do You Want a Guild/Regional Network?

That’s the first question to answer, and this manual doesn’t assume that the answer is “Yes!”

First: Remember the two-person rule. You will need at least two biblical storytellers to form a guild – preferably more, of course, but at least two, and preferably from more than one congregation.

If you are all from one congregation, what you may have is a Scripture by Heart team – also a valuable part of the network, but not a guild – yet. A Scripture by Heart group can be a great first step toward a guild.



What Kind of a Guild Do You Want?



Guilds, also known as regional networks, come in various flavors. The vision you have when you start out can change over time, depending on the participants' skills and needs, and that's fine. And it's OK to be unsure.

But to start, sit down together and brainstorm about what your vision(s) are for your guild, at least to start. The clearer your vision, the easier it will be to decide what to do next! For example:

Will you be primarily a **teaching group**, meeting every month for workshops and coaching one another?

Will you be a small group of **performers**, presenting programs and epic tellings in area churches and secular storytelling festivals?

Will you be mainly a **socializing and support** group? Don't underestimate the importance of supporting one another in the art, especially if members' home churches and pastors are not supportive.

How will you *encourage everyone to learn and tell biblical stories*?

For example:

CinDay Guild of the Cincinnati-Dayton area, the oldest continually active guild in the network, is primarily a **teaching group**.



Meetings usually include time for people to tell stories they are in the process of learning and get feedback, or for someone to lead a "story learning" workshop, which gives the presenter a chance to practice teaching/leading workshops, and others the opportunity to learn a new story. CinDay also organizes group telling programs with a variety of storytellers, so inexperienced storytellers can get "stage experience" without being responsible for an entire program.



Prairie Wind Guild, in the Chicago area, has both a central group of **performers** which present epic tellings in area churches and a much wider news list which receives a monthly promotion email.

The monthly news tells where the guild is telling as well as where individual members are performing, leading workshops, and participating in international mission. It reminds pastors to invite tellers for summer pulpit supply and encourages attendance at NBSI Festival Gathering. Prairie Wind Guild is actively involved in support of individual tellers, NBSI and international work. Prairie Wind Guild doesn't meet monthly.



NBS TOGETHER: The Online Guild is primarily a **socializing and support** group which meets on a flexible schedule, usually monthly, through a Google+ hangout. We share what's happening and encourage one another. We try to remember to share tellings and offer positive feedback to one another, if there's time! Meetings are quite lively, with participants hailing from Albania to Australia. NBS TOGETHER has helped inspire new guilds and scripture by heart groups.

Finding and Creating Tellers

Finding tellers:

- Check out the attendance roster from **NBSI's last Festival Gathering** for folks in your area.
- Contact **NBSI Ambassadors** in your area and ask if they know folks who have expressed interest but had no guild to connect with. You can find Ambassadors by contacting the member of the Board of NBSI whose responsibility is **Membership**. You can identify this person by calling the NBSI office: (800)355-6627 or (317)931-2352.
- Contact the **leaders of nearby guilds** whose territories border the area where you're starting a guild. They may have contact information for folks who are *just too far away* to be active in their group, but may be delighted to be part of yours. Check out the guild directory at www.nbsint.org/nbsguilds
- Ask beth@bethgalbreath.com or Joyce at cindaynbs@gmail.com for help in accessing the NBSI **database** of folks who have either attended Festival Gathering in the last decade or so, or asked to be on the NBSI email list, in your area.
- If you're involved in a **secular storytelling organization**, try telling a "generic" story from the Bible at the next open mic night. Parables are good, or stories about Abraham or Moses (which are sacred to Judaism, Islam and Christianity), or Jonah, Ruth or Esther. Have NBSI information available on hand for anyone who expresses interest in biblical stories.

Creating tellers:

- Start a **Scripture by Heart group** in your congregation.
- Offer a **workshop** at:
your local **ministerial association** meeting,
a **denominational event** in your area, or
your local Bible **colleges or seminaries**
- Get your **denominational leader** in your area on board. For example: Bob Booz showed the power of biblical storytelling to his district superintendent, and she asked him to accompany him and tell the Scripture for worship as she made her rounds to church conferences in his district. At these events Bob put out a **sign-up sheet** for interested folks. Many, many evenings later, Bob had enough names to offer workshops, including a workshop at his denomination's regional conference. And those workshops led to a vision of Central Keystone Guild in Pennsylvania.



Above all, be patient, be flexible, be spirit-filled. Remember that biblical storytelling is first of all a spiritual discipline that requires passion. Many people will enjoy listening to you tell biblical stories, but some will also have the passion to tell them - those are the people you want in your Guild.

What Do You Need to Start a Guild?

You've already identified, in this workbook, two crucial elements for a guild: The **two or more charter members** of the group and your **initial visions** for your guild. So, what needs to be in place next:

- **A name.** What will you call yourselves? The word "Guild" doesn't need to be in your name. Some folks see it as too old-fashioned (although young folks who play medieval style role-playing games know exactly what a guild is).

Check out the guild directory at www.nbsint.org/nbsguilds to see what other groups have named themselves. Many groups have "Guild" in the name, but not all, for example: Metro NBS, Tidewater Tellers, Women of the Well. Groups generally, but not always, have some geographical reference in their names (CinDay, Prairie Wind, Western New York, Tidewater, Metro, Shenandoah Valley).

Important: You're invited to call your group "**associated with**" NBSI, but not "of" NBSI. This is a legal protection for both your group and NBSI.

- **A pusher.** One of the charter members must take responsibility for being the "pusher." You can call him or her coordinator, president, organizer, whatever – but somebody must take responsibility for communications with the group, making arrangements for meetings, and just gently pushing everyone to do what they've promised. This is the person who asks, "When's our next meeting?" or "What epic will we tell next?" Not someone who has all the answers, but someone who is passionate about the art, willing to push the questions, and delegate tasks to others.
- **A free place to meet.** Meeting in someone's centrally located church is a no-brainer if the church is hospitable to the group. That is not to be taken for granted, and it can be that no one in the group belongs to a church that is centrally located and easy to get to. Pay attention to freeway access and ease of navigation when choosing your meeting place or places.

If a church is not available, often a library may have a community meeting room available for public use. Ask. Libraries may have rules about length of meeting, food permitted or not, and whether you have to keep the noise down which you will have to be aware of. Some stories are very loud!

If neither of these work, someone's home will be the next choice. Be aware of accessibility issues in all these types of buildings.

- **A decision about when to meet.** You obviously won't have a year's worth of meetings planned in advanced, but you do need a day and a time for your first meeting, and maybe a general idea about how often you will probably plan to meet, which you'll need when talking to the church, library, or members about location.
- **A contact person.** The contact person may or may not be your "pusher." You'll need your contact person when you send that person's name and email along with other information about your guild to Beth Galbreath for inclusion in the NBSI guild directory.
- An initial **vision and a plan** for carrying out the mission of *encouraging everyone to learn and tell biblical stories by heart*. **Use your strengths.** Be willing to switch plans if necessary. The people in your guild – the number and their strengths - will determine what you do. Earlier in this process you listed a number of possibilities, a number of possible visions or projects. Trim that down to one thing you will do first, based on the strengths of your members.



What Do You Need to Keep Going?

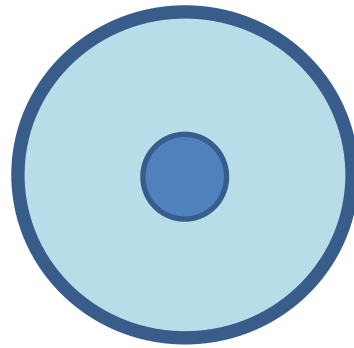
You need one central thing to sustain a guild (other than people, purpose/vision and a plan):

Communication

Communication means connection, and it doesn't just happen. You need a **web presence** so outside people – tellers and churches – can find you. You need a **system of communication** among members, both your central core and the broader “interested” crowd you hope to connect with. Such systems come in two flavors: Free and not-free!

Web presence options include:

- A website of your own (not-free)
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Google+
- Pinterest
- And.....



If your charter members include someone who owns a website and maintains it, a free subdomain may be available which that person would be willing to maintain for you. For example, Prairie Wind Guild's website is a subdomain of bethgalbreath.com, and she maintains it. This is a task that few volunteers do well. There are template-based sites (not free) that make the job easier but also look like template-based sites.

The benefit of a website is that it can contain permanent contact information about your guild and group members and its current activities. The benefit of free social media sites is that they invite participation by any of your members, but the drawback is that the timeline moves and items you wanted to be permanent can be lost. Features are always changing, too, so someone needs to be in charge of your social media presence and keep up on the details. A social media account that just sits there is soon ignored.

Communication Systems options include:

- Constant Contact (not free)
- Mail Chimp (free)
- And.....

Your communication system must include a way to connect with your central core of members, who don't mind sharing their email addresses with each other. Standard, personal email accounts and distribution lists that allow you to send email to multiple people at one time will be okay when you are starting out, and your list of contacts (guild members and potential audiences) is very small and your emailing promotions infrequent. But you may want to consider creating a separate email account to use for Guild communications - either a free account through one of the popular providers, or an account specific to a mass-emailing provider, like Constant Contact or Mail Chimp.

Regardless of what kind of email you use, remember to respect and protect the privacy of your recipients. Always use BCC: (blind copy) instead of CC: (copy) for large email lists. A very large number of “CC” or “BCC” addresses on an email can get you blacklisted as a spammer. Even if that doesn't happen, the people

who sign up on your enews signup sheets at your events will not appreciate exposing their email address to other people or to spambots. So you need a system to send one email at a time, such as with Constant Contact or Mail Chimp.

Money – maybe

Do you need money to support a guild? That depends on your vision and what other resources you have.

As an online-only, international, socializing and support group, NBS TOgether: The Online Guild uses only free publicly/internationally available communications (Gmail, Google+ Hangouts and YouTube). It handles no money and needs none.



CinDay Guild has a very small "petty cash" fund handled by one of the leaders, because opening a bank account may require a corporate id, 501(c) registration, or personal social security number, and may affect your personal taxes. (Check with your local banker.) CinDay has few expenses, and income usually comes from performances: contracted/hired Guild performances, Guild-arranged performances for a "freewill offering" or a "split the pot" with the hosting organization, or occasionally, "booking fees" for single storyteller performances that are booked through the Guild.

Prairie Wind Guild, on the other hand, quickly discovered its program involved costs, including subsidizing gasoline for members coming from a distance to an epic telling, so that persons of various economic sectors could participate. And they wanted a basic Constant Contact account to send out really cool enews. (By the way, keeping your distribution list in the cloud, but secure, also ensures against losing it when one person's computer dies, as it assuredly will.)

So PWG started doing epic tellings – eight the first year, a half dozen or so yearly after that – and putting out a basket for donations, on a table along with an enews sign-up sheet and **free** copies of *The Biblical Storyteller* outreach issue and Festival Gathering brochures for people to take (both free to your guild from the NBSI office upon request). And the money rolled in. The church where the guild first met agreed to sponsor the ministry and handle its money in its own accounts. This has two great benefits: it enables the money to be banked and handled with integrity for free, and enables donors to get a tax deduction if they wish.

Today, donations at PWG epics support:

- **Tithing to NBS International.** After every epic, one-tenth of the income is immediately sent to NBSI. After all, without NBSI, we would never have discovered this wonderful art!
- **Gasoline subsidy** to participants. Some donate their subsidy, but others greatly appreciate the \$10 or \$20 subsidy, depending on the distance a person has come.
- Over-ear **microphones**, purchased at the rate of one per year, so that we don't need to pass microphones borrowed from the host church back and forth
- **International mission:** A weekly biblical storytelling radio show produced by NBS Cameroon and aired in a number of cities of the West African nation. We could also support members involved in NBSI mission trips.
- **Scholarships** for Festival Gathering attendance. In 2015, three \$300 scholarships were awarded.

However you decide to handle your Guild finances, you must handle them with integrity. We suggest you handle your income and expenses as churches do: Immediately after the event, at the same place where the money was received, two people together count the money and sign a “counting record”, which becomes part of your guild records. Gasoline subsidies deducted in cash from the total are marked on the sheet.

The money is taken to the church and marked for deposit into the guild’s account. If you are sending it in the mail, then someone needs to buy the cash with a check, so that only checks are mailed.

Requests for payments are made according to the church’s voucher system. For best relationships with the church, it pays to provide stamped, pre-addressed envelopes with the request, so that the church’s only expense is the check itself.

Someone writes short **thank-you notes** to every donor who wrote a check. This is crucial for public relations and for the donor’s tax information, though they will also get a letter from the church in January – a small donation to the church would be appreciated then, to offset the cost of these letters to folks who aren’t their regular donors. Also, someone writes a larger thank-you suitable for posting on the bulletin board of the host church for the event.

Reports of income and expenses are provided to the central core group at each meeting. The great things the guild is supporting are bragged about with every monthly enews!

Go tell it – and build your guild!

Network of Biblical Storytellers, Intl. Planning Sheet

Do you want to start an NBSI guild/regional network?

What's your interest in biblical storytelling?

I prefer to work alone.

- Join the Network of Biblical Storytellers, Intl. Attend the annual Festival Gathering for workshops on storytelling and story learning.

I prefer to work with other storytellers...

...preparing and telling the scripture in worship at my church in cooperation with those who plan worship

- Start a Scripture by Heart group.

...telling the stories of the Bible in a wide variety of settings and situations, both religious and secular

- Use this worksheet to plan your NBSI guild.

NBSI Guild Worksheet

What kind of Guild do we want to be?

- Performance Teaching Socializing & Support
 Other _____

Who are your charter members? (the "Two Person" Rule) Our

Contact person is:

Our "Pusher" is:

Where will we find other potential storytellers?

Our Guild name is: _____

and our geographic area is _____

Our initial meeting will be (date)_____ (time) _____
(place)_____

How often will we meet? _____

Our first Project:

Communications, /social media, and the person/people responsible:

Finances:

What do we need money for?

What is our source of income? (dues, programs, donations, etc.)

How will the money be handled, and by whom?

To get your Guild listed on the NBSI site, contact **Rev. Beth Galbreath, beth@bethgalbreath.com**

